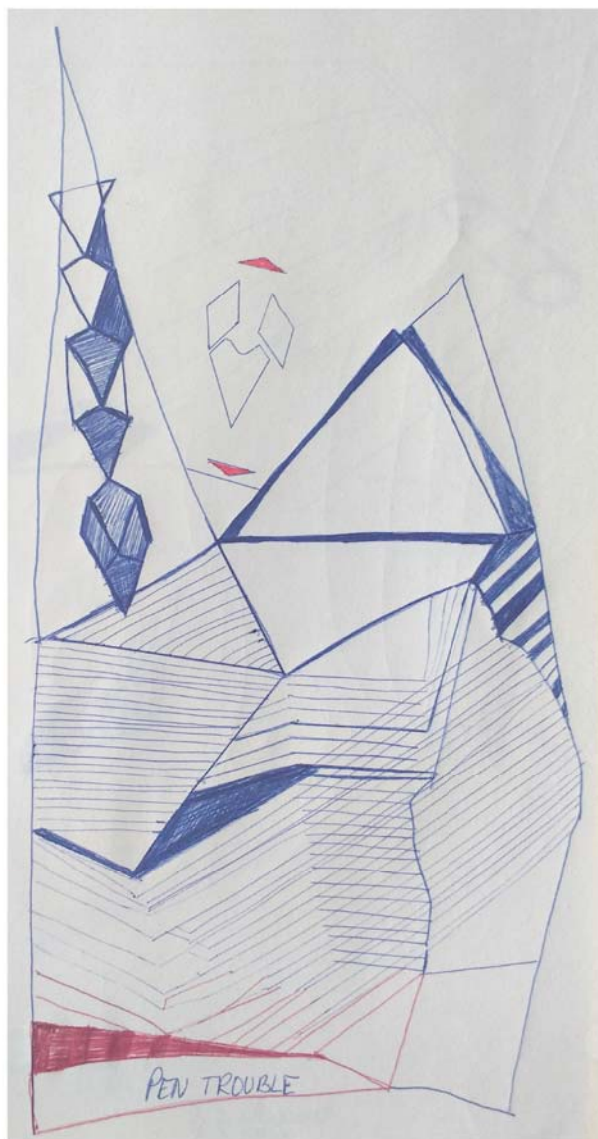


Patricia Pruitt

Blueline



Alyscamps Press
Paris

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Edited by
Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno & Karl Orend

Preface by
Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno



Alyscamps Press

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Acknowledgements

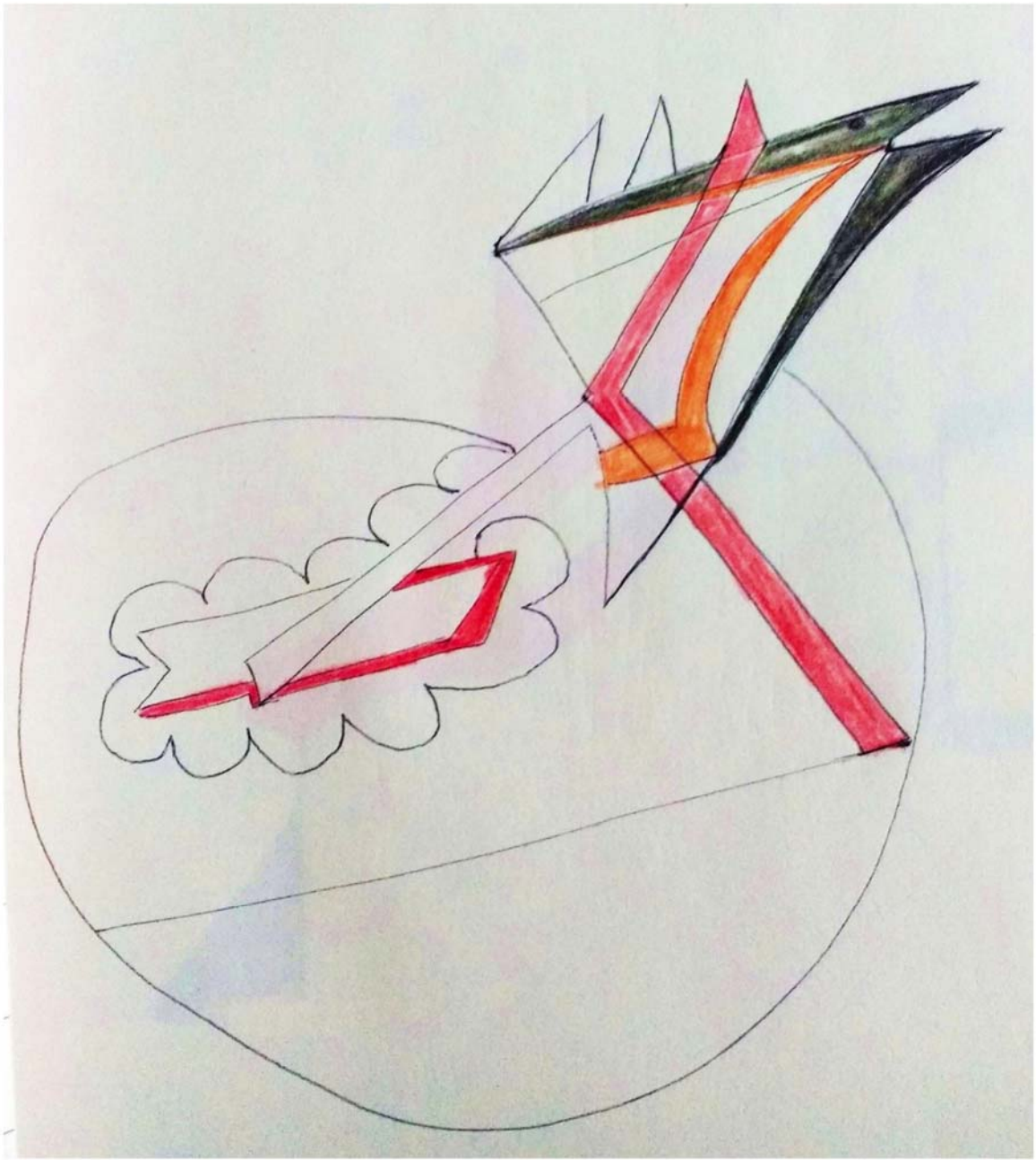
Some of these poems first appeared in slightly different forms, and under the title *Blue Lines*, in *Lift* (No. 7, August 1991). Others were printed in her collection *Full Moon at Sunset: Selected Poems* (Northfield, MA: Talisman House, 2017).

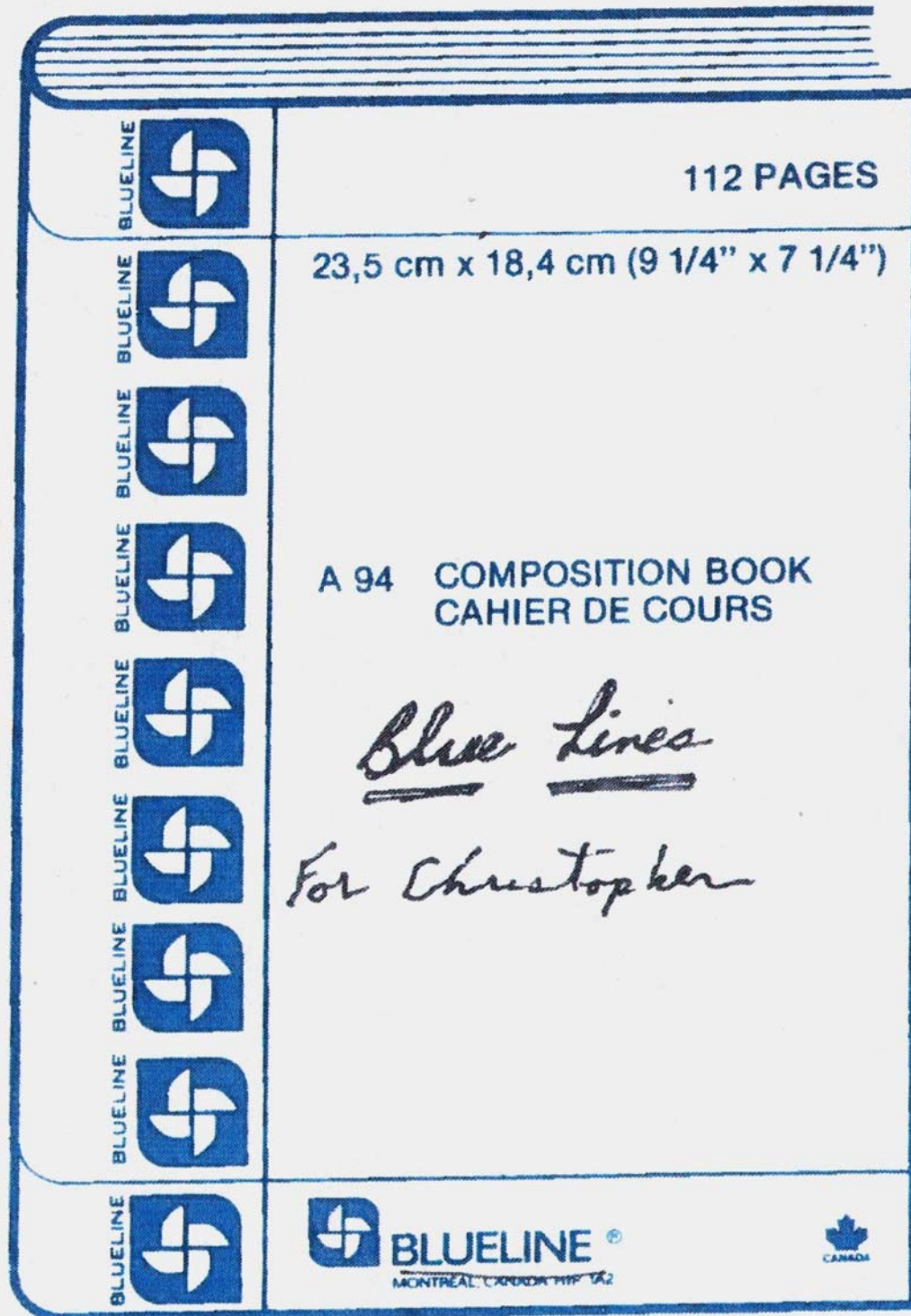
BlueLine

She can see a band of sun shining against
 the wall in the room of the green house next door.
 Nothing else is visible. Nothing moves in the line
 of her sight. There is nothing unusual about this.
 Although the trees have been nearly stripped
 by the winds of yesterday & the cold wind
 of today. She is still cozy enough
 on the sun porch in full sun at 2
 in the afternoon, the heater warming
 her back well enough. Through the
 windows she can feel the draft of
 the wind, ~~and~~ the cool against her
 cheeks & hands is a pleasant contrast
 to the heat at her back. She has so
 much to do. The disappearance of her
 determination has been inexplicable
 and a loss. She keeps trying to reconnect
 with it. Yesterday the image arose of a
 worm inside a marshmallow. She thought
 of all the charred black toasted marshmallows
 she ate & loved eating as a kid, that melted
 in white hot sugar over her lips ^{and} teeth
 giving her intense oral pleasure but
 nothing else. The pleasure of putting a
 shared stick point in to the white soft puff
 ball and holding it into the flames where it
 blue blew up & grew brown the black then
 black blistered until it exploded or nearly so.

while writing to a friend she often adopts the tone of the other person. Why this occurs is not clear to her or to anyone. Perhaps she thinks to herself, if I speak to you in your voice you'll recognize what I'm saying or you'll be able to hear it better. Cassandra told the truth but no one was able to believe her, to take what she said as truth. It must have ^{been} a simple problem of tone - assuming that it was entirely her problem or not the fault of the inability of the others to accept what they hear as true.

Skeptics. Perhaps she was surrounded by virulent skeptics who constitutionally could not accept anything as truth, even the assertion "there is no truth." Perhaps Cassandra had a high wheedling voice. It would be hard to hear that sort of voice as speaking the truth. The same for a voice which rattled - it would seem too deliberately to frighten the listener, would arouse all the listener's defenses against fear. Or a too loud, bossy voice. The only response one wants, it is Fuck you! or Shut up! She - not Cassandra so all of this is just side track & has nothing to do with getting at the truth of why she adopts qualities of another's voice when she talks. Perhaps she has a gift for mimicry, this is a talent about little developed. Perhaps she wants to be the other person, get inside the other through appropriation of his/her vocal attributes. But why? Why would it be that?







Preface

Patricia Pruitt wrote *Blueline* between June of 1991 and February of 1992 and revised it extensively in 1993. It was her first and only foray into writing an extended sequence of prose poems. The handwritten manuscript, originally entitled *Blue Lines* was composed when she was living in Somerville, Massachusetts, while the revision was completed in Turners Falls, Massachusetts. Her apartment in Somerville overlooked a traffic rotary on Alewife Brook Parkway, which is referenced several times in the book.

The title was likely originally inspired by the notebook logo “BLUELINE” in which she wrote the manuscript. Beyond this obvious association, however, there are other subtler meanings: her blue pen created blue lines; blue lines on a road map indicate secondary roads that allows one to take in sights not visible from the interstates; her mood was also often blue as she composed the work. In these lines from one of the later poems in the book she tells us more about the meaning:

Going back and forth on a thin line in a small, designated, space.
Following the imaginary blue line like an open road leading to a glass of wine, the lamp, the wind coming in through tightly closed windows, the line of headlights coming into the rotary.

Prose was not a new form for Patricia. Before enrolling in the M.F.A. Program at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, she had been working on a novel. But once in residence there, poetry claimed her, or perhaps I should say, she claimed poetry. Under the guidance of many remarkable teachers including Allen Ginsburg, Anne Waldman, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Anselm Hollo, Keith Abbot, Diane DiPrima and Bernadette Mayer she began to experiment with a myriad of forms. Diane and Bobbie Louise, in particular, encouraged her already fine ability to “listen for stories.” Anne and Bernadette encouraged her to find poems in dream narratives. Her notebooks from the period are filled with memories of dreams and snippets of conversation, some overheard as an eavesdropper, others in which she was a participant. *Blueline* contains a great deal of transcription from everyday speech.

Some of the speech and concerns she enunciated in *Blueline* were her own; others are the result of spending a great deal of time with two close women friends who were in the process of leaving their husbands. Patricia was always an amazing listener. She allowed everyone to tell her their troubles. On occasion, she offered advice but most of the time just listened. She realized that talking often was all

that was necessary to achieve some clarity in a knotty situation. She, however, rarely confided in anyone except for me.

At the time Patricia began writing *Blueline*, she was in an unquiet period of transition. In graduate school, her main focus was on writing. Her time in Boulder was a heady experience. During her two years there, she lived mostly alone. For the first time in her life she was able to devote herself to making. Surrounded by brilliant and supportive colleagues and faculty, she began to feel, as she told me, “a true writer.” Now back at home, she found herself once again having to balance family life and her work.

Despite her occasional insecurity, she did have support and admiration from a large community of poets. Joe Torra published her work in his magazine *Lift*, including pieces from *Blueline*. Ed Foster took poems for *Talisman*. She read at the St. Mark's Poetry Project in New York and many other venues. Locally, Michael Franco invited her to read on several occasions in his Cambridge poetry series Word of Mouth. Two of her chapbooks were published in 1991. The first, from Longwood Press, was *Construction Work*. Busking Editions, on the occasion of her reading at L'Atelier Bleu in Paris in November of 1991, published another chapbook *(in)Congruity*.¹

Patricia was a very disciplined writer. She would usually rise early, have her green tea and coffee with me, and then get to work in her study for several hours. Everyone knew not to disturb her. Around noon she'd emerge to begin the more social part of her day. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Patricia was not in any way a careerist. She was, however, well known among her poetry peers. Or as Boston poet Bill Corbett once said when introducing her at a reading on the occasion of the publication of her chapbook *Windows* (2002) by his imprint Pressed Wafer: “Patricia is a poet's poet.”

Publication was far less important to her than the simple act of creation. She valued her work, valued her identity as a poet, but she used to respond when asked why she didn't publish more, “Isn't it enough just to write it?”

Patricia died on April 23, 2018 at the age of 72 from complications due to ALS.

Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno
Turners Falls, Massachusetts

¹ “Drawing Point,” her long, complex poem contained in *(in)Congruity*, and which she read in Paris, was republished in 2016, in a revised version, by Alyscamps Press.

BlueLine

The air is impossible as if someone has thrown rose petals everywhere; it is done in certain festivals in India: Saffron and rose. Out of a palm grove two figures tumble. One in pink lycra, rotund and tall; the other in the same costume is short and lean. Both have black hair. Mesmerized by color, they are—she thinks—my own Tweedledum and Tweedledee, though it's not original of her to think so. Ah, but referencing is important in some circles. While she ruminates the two pink-clad fellows (she couldn't hold the men: too cute or familiar) come nearer. The tall fat one has large fleshy hands matted with black hair. The other has child's hands. They draw pink air with them. Standing stock still, she makes a tremendous effort to move. Her effort—a flutter of eyelids.

She feels hurried. The other could come along at any second and ruin everything. What everything exactly? The carefully constructed sense of some important and irrevocable act to be accomplished in the brevity of Friday afternoon, the 14th; the light is rapidly leaving us short. When the President made his announcement on the South Lawn, a siren wailed behind him for all of the question and answer period. Did he hear it? He has his back turned and his eye fixed on the dead idea of an army in the desert—an army in the desert painted red. When someone like that gets in she is suspicious. All she can hear is that siren in the city. Hardly anyone is getting what they want, if they know what they want. Dead idea = Dead people.

A day to begin again as the next beginning in the series follows the last. A wife arrives home to her husband whom she wishes to leave. He is scared but unmoving. Or he is scared so unmoving. Whatever she wants he will give. He believes this; he believes prayers may help. Her hair stands up on the back of her neck. She sees exactly the drama he is in. As if that is expected of him. He will be absurd and painful. Begin again in another place.

The woman downstairs lives in a steamy conglomerate of cooking aromas and odors, of scraped plates, and stirred aluminum pots. Outside the chess player cultivates the look of the Ancients with a white, chest-blanketing beard and tangled, hoary locks. In opposition to the weather he wears a heavy hand-knit sweater and woolen socks on his sandaled feet. Is he Homer or Socrates come back? Would he say, “Know thyself?”

Then, of course, you can reverse the process, if you want, and go from back to front. Just be sure to follow the directions for wiping on the little box. Use three separate tissues and wipe from front to back three separate times—each time with a fresh, antiseptic tissue. Then direct the flow into this plastic cup. You'd need not fill it to the brim. The name of today's investigation is vaginal odor. No one wants to talk about such things, least of all her. Will she have to give up her pleasuring device? Of course it could be linked to that faulty pap smear she had last year. But this? To be malodorous is unthinkable. Never. Womb-rot is another of her suspicions. Disuse. Lying fallow too long has produced a mold similar to that which forms on the left-too-long-in-the-fridge-mashed potatoes. Never mind that. Mold presents itself vividly enough.

Pap smear sounds neither scientific, nor hygienic, she decides as she waits to be examined. Pap smear reminds her of a vicious gossip campaign at Columbia University during the 60's.

Sit down. Let morning go round and round the rotary. Reassurance in motion, relocation beyond the hear and now. North is the hardest direction to face for there lies true light. Benign as the air is for winter, she has goose bumps and cold feet. Someday she will have to shift pronouns at least. Night left her nothing to chew on. The landslide inches down. Distance accumulates. She disappears once more for an irregular length of time. There's a tired blue fading above.

The steel ruler lies across the red pencil box. By the 17th inch rests the yellow pencil sharpener: two-holed, large and small. The red pencil box is bordered on one end by a green pen, on the other, by a blue. It makes so little difference to anything moving. She wants to say Watteau Sky. But she isn't sure what that looks like or if it is what she sees in the cloud arrangement of the moment. She's been wanting to say "Watteau Sky" for days. Not knowing what sort of sky it is has held her back. But she must; she doesn't care anymore. Watteau Sky. There's a Watteau Sky above me. (And no one to love me.) *Non sequitur sequit non sequitur*. Where can she be? Turn away, turn to repetition. In the way she prefers to call the merry-go-round Flying Horses.

Would she be able to talk non-stop against the onslaught of another voice which will in the end silence her? This is the part they have created for her. The event will take perhaps three minutes, or maybe 30 seconds. It depends on how long she can keep up her end. She also sees that the shoulders of her black silk blouse have been cut from the collar to the underarm. If she wears it, her flesh will show through the slashes. In the final scene she and a man approach an isolated subway turnstile on a vacant plain. He hands her script to pay for the ride. The script is merely red strips of paper of varying widths and lengths. Some pieces are over a foot long. The train-man is surprised: "That went out years ago," he tells her. Finally he relents and she pushes through. In these sequences she feels as if the others see her as an object to be selected or rejected at will.

Before the monument a line of gray-suited men faces front in a military manner. One of these is readily recognizable. He is unmistakable with his crisp small stature, his brusque assured movements. The mustache. Anyone who has seen the newsreels knows these gestures, that face, those neat, sharp shoulders. Every move he makes bristles with furor. The men have broken ranks and are shaking hands all around. The air is congratulatory, but the little man is distracted and looking beyond the others, beyond the frame to something outside the situation. A loud voice announces, "The Tower of Lyon has 6402 steps. The little man will climb them all." As soon as the voiceover finishes, the same man runs triumphantly out of the frame. After a few seconds the broadcaster announces his success. The other men whisper angrily without losing their places in line.

This much has taken from sunrise to just after noon. The fog has burnt off. There's a party in three days, and guests for dinner tonight. Fine. Speech-makers will dominate the conversation. If the children come, she can play nanny. The fog has burnt off. Should say away. Say cleared. Save burnt for old wood. Basic movements then. Beyond this, behind this what more is to come would take the pressure off. Such as do delight in morning and red snapper forever *huachinango* and simmering in a black pan. It opens a space to be in, to expect nothing. One will sleep over.

Split. Into another who is free, or strong, or angry, or vulgar, evil? Split. Rid herself of the chaos of one. How thoroughly do these splits take place: Does each new woman have a distinctive wardrobe, her own closet and handbag? Do they exist only on a verbal or an emotional plane? Where does each one live? Whose bed does # 36 lie down in? Is it like traveling with the circus? She realizes she will never shatter. No. She's a shrinker.

Shrinking into a mere button. Shanks but no eyes. "Shall I leave it at that?" she asks. "Was that you number 10? No it was ..."

She left the field back there after squatting over clover and dandelion grass in the great outdoors. Trees peek, and grass tickles. Bold blades, that is. A lot at the start, not at the end. Murmurs of kitchen. All peripheries peripheral and fleeting, in focus or out. It unnerves her to see from within. Acute minutiae take over. Yarn and brooms. Crumb of bread.

She is floating on the uneven surface farther out than she ever intended. She comes ashore on unsteady feet. “God bless you,” says the Nanny.

Meticulous, fully formed things sit on the table: a black, octopus-patterned Cretan water jug, a black, plastic file box, closed, with a packet of white 3x5's bound by a blue rubber band on the lid. A stack of assorted “Art” postcards, a packet of blue airmail envelopes, notes bearing the initial “P.,” a warning from the Colorado Student Loan Office, a box of black diskettes, a black and white lamp, a book by Wen Fu called *The Art Of Writing*, Crane's Distaff Linen, a Japanese notebook, rose-scented soap papers, three small filled note pads, a yellow paper umbrella made in China, intended as a party favor, a list of poisonous plants, White-Out in black and red bottles, Queneau's *Exercices de style*, two Duras novels, a box of colored pencils, two folders, a red glasscase, six pens, a red and black notebook. A list of things to do to make things better: the first item—throw rocks.

There were nine. And two bright oranges in the lower corner, sitting on the wall. A blue wall. The oranges looked irradiated or lit from within where there should have been flesh. The one in the bank was also Greek, and handsome. She saw the same thing on a rack in a store not far from here. Why is she so impressed by the transparency of black? The name on the pencil box is Venus, but she cannot write love stories. She is too easily deterred by addition and subtraction. The veneer of calm. The veneer of carnelian, vermillion: which is it? She remembers at last. The long walk by the beach where the boys sat naked in the sand trailing the blonde grains over their thighs. Languid, thoughtful boys. She could feel a slight decrease in the velocity of day. She walked away quickly so as not to create a disturbance in the frame. In a field of Black-Eyed Susans and cowslip awash in pale chartreuse thinned with white.

“You can't leave off now,” she sneers, “or you'll not know what it all comes to.”
“She's vicious when she wants to be,” says the Nanny.
Wherever did those boys go? We do like our boys!

Down the chute. The radiators radiate at will, provoked to it by a number—say 62. 62 sets it all going and it comforts her the radiating in the dark of heat. Two hairy apples lie in a wooden bowl: hairy because their insides have gone to brown pulp. “Do you have any fruit besides these two hairy apples?” I have none. She has none. Consequently none has none. She has dry cracked skin on her lips. Through the cracks comes the theme song for NPR. She is going elsewhere. She hears the news herself.

Radiators are a warm light in the darkness. The comfort circles in and repeats as one apple repeats another. Perhaps she exaggerates. The air is gone. No matter; she goes on breathing out of habit. She remembers how to breathe under these conditions from the tadpole stage. From when she was gilled. In small gulps. Fish eating fishflakes.

Knowing it is time; knowing it has reached 68, but not knowing what it is. As she sits in the kitchen, choices crumple and disappear. “They've been without air too long.”

When writing to a friend she often adopts the tone of voice she thinks the other will read her letter in. She thinks to herself, if I speak to you in your voice, you'll recognize what I'm saying. Or you'll hear it better. She sees Cassandra whom no one was able to believe, who told the truth. She has decided to eliminate any possible problem with tone. It must have been a simple problem of tone, her tone. An inability to accept what is said as true. Then there are skeptics. Perhaps she was surrounded by virulent skeptics who constitutionally could not accept anything as true, not even the assertion, "It may be true." Perhaps Cassandra had a high, wheedling voice. It would be hard to hear that sort of voice as the voice of truth. The same for a voice which had rattles or rasps in it. Such a voice would seem to be deliberately frightening the listener, would arouse only defenses against believing what it said. If it were too loud or bossy?

She is not Cassandra but she wants to eliminate as many possibilities for misunderstanding as she can. That is her aim. Perhaps it's her gift for mimicry. Perhaps she wanted to be the other person, the one she has written to, if only for the duration of the letter. To appropriate her voice, her vocabulary. But why would that be it?

Today managed to touch her. It came formless, but visible, like rain in a cloud. It surrounded her, being what fallen trees know. It brought the felling into her.

How differently the Chinese see the full moon which to them is most perfect on August 5—halfway through the lunar calendar. It is unity and peace. It is where she wants to go after earth. There's an old man who serves wine to the newcomers. No madness, no blood-letting, no wild dark passion. In the lunar calendar all is balance and rounded like the number— 360— of days.

She will change the calendar she lives by, flee from solar to lunar. In the round bright cool light, blue light and silver water light, no more noontimes.

She is rippled easily by any leaf or rock that falls against her surface, and takes all debris to her innermost self that stores it snugly. Accretions of mud cling to it over time. Now dredging has begun and she is disturbed, off-balance, spilling her banks, slurping and sucking to keep what is on the bottom down there. And yet she would be clean and fresh again—a place where sleek minnows and blue trout meander up to catch a fly or two. But what a loss of water lilies and her borders of puce algae. The darkness on her surface reflects her bottle-pitted bottom and not the blue above. Wet decay is lodged against her sides. The dredgers hope to save her from a quagmire death. A sour odor rises from her oily skin. When it rains she shivers.

The woman who escaped gravity cannot serve as a suitable model for the rest. Besides which, there are too many donuts in America. What is one to make of it when she simultaneously saw the other one again yesterday, huddled under a red umbrella on a bench holding *Vogue* and her pink plastic bundle in one crabbed hand. She has gone gray, shrunken, and still her clothes seem too small. Her coat, for example, stops above the hem of her skirt. Her face is concave on either side of her nose. She doesn't want to be a bother so she allows herself only the simplest of questions. Imagine her asking the woman standing beside her, "Is this where the 88 bus stops?" She is sociable, though, of course she knows the answer, having sat on this bench 1000 times in her efforts to keep busy. In this way she has somewhere to go and come back from. To be on the way to or from. To be at. To be about to leave. To have returned from or waiting to go to. Every destination is vital.

The reds have deepened to wine-brown and dark orange. The bright yellows are mustard now. The oak slipped overnight out of green into rust-brown. It clings to its leaves and few have fallen. Headed north into the short dark days when the sun is an hallucination in the darkness. Stars the cold source of light. The sun ripens the flesh, plumps it up; the stars wither it with hard points thrusting out into nothing. Down here and daily the majority pats its dogs and cats with affection and very few mind as long as the dog wags its tail. No one comes unexpectedly to the door as in a dream one can arrive at a circus and a strange clearing and walk the tight rope as naturally as picking a daisy. We cannot live long on the edge. Without it we can't live. The odd morning when we finally walk off along the railroad tracks arrives for very few. The odd morning finds us settled in a favorite chair. And if someone is at the door, we haven't heard the knock, or we're too lazy to go down and open.

On Sunday all words are violins in French. Bless me, Dear, isn't it time for a little road trip outta here? Where? To the southland, the heartland of the Grand Ol' Opre. Where Ruby Lee squats in the field, sure no one can see her way down there, even though her fresh white socks are getting smudged against the old moldy tree trunk. From there it is exactly 678 steps to the end of the dirt road where the bus will stop and pick her up standing by the roadside her money pushed down in a wad in her jean pocket.

What if he's coming to hunt her up, bring her back? She waits thirty more minutes, then, half stands like an old woman and heads for the fence.

Another born. Another boy. So. What does it mean? What can you find to pick at in the birth of a child? Potential salvation, a great this or that. A buddha in the back yard. And there is regeneration, even hope. You're a nasty human being yourself.

Stiff-hipped she hasn't got her feet on the ground. She's hanging upside-down and inside-out. No wonder she can't see straight and can't hold on to more than makeshift anchors which dissolve more or less like wet paper towels. Whenever she's hung up she wants out and a purpose or at least an alternative. If it is all a hoax, a merely endless series of sensations that wax and wane and then resurge can this be called intelligent action? Is this the stuff of life, this float with no legs to stand on? A voice asks, "What about freedom?"
"Fuck it! Just get me down."

There was some unity after all. Back here again what to do with it. Hovering on the safe edge of action, in ideas. The fire is really going now; one cherry log, two pine burn in the red ash-bed. She wants it to be gray or forest green if she does it. So much goes unfinished in all colors. She left the room because of the phone call. Now the call is ended and she cannot return to the cozy fire. She will go it alone. If she pauses for a second, the drip fills the air and it's all over. What it comes to is striped in three colors. So stay with him although you are the one by yourself. The fire must die out of its own accord. It can't sustain them.

Stop-gap measures were their specialty: clever, ambitious, even well-executed, short term activities that made great stories years later but at the time didn't require, and were never intended to require, a commitment of any duration. The creation of an interesting past was what they had been committed to most. Now that they're best friends were breaking up, the future of that friendship—the oldest they had—seemed canceled. So it, like so many other interesting periods in their lives, was moving to the back burner where stories were simmered and kept ready for serving whenever receptive listeners with a glass or two of wine were around. The stories were always dressed in superlatives. This allowed the two of them to participate in the telling: his part was the exaggeration of every detail, hers the shaving down of his claims with a tightening-up of salient points. It became a comfortable routine: They substituted telling the past for displaying who they were now.

The funeral gear. Guest book with 14 names listed. The flower cards: Two sent by his ex-wife, one sent by the husband and daughters of his daughter. An American flag, folded by military regulation, into a triangle. Three copies of the obituary. The original obit cut out from *The Gazette*. Died of the complications of pneumonia. 75. Fathered two daughters, married once. Unemployed on a small pension from the V.A.. One month before his death sold the 8 acres he owned. Summers he hired himself out as a gardener; winters he stayed at the Whittier Hotel or read in the public library. *Tom Sawyer* was his favorite book. His nickname as a kid had been “Shanks.” One of the names in the guestbook belonged to the young woman from the diner who cried inconsolably as she looked down into his powdered sunken face. He was dressed in a brown wool suit and lay buried to the chest in creamy white satin. The daughter wondered if he was naked from the waist down.

The shedding began imperceptibly as a feeling of her own life passing and a gathering within, a drawing together of her capacity to change. She felt it as a beginning, not a decline. She shed her beige and white bras and bought a purple lace underwire with the cups joined by two thin loops of nylon. She bought black lace and a matching camisole. She ventured out to concerts and read novels about characters with secret lives. "I want one of those," she said. Most importantly she shed her demure acceptance of disappointment. She kept track of every let-down and found it to be her last. She exercised so diligently her body returned to its 25-year-old resiliency and form. She drank a high potency drink every morning and stopped eating sugar. When her boss kissed her in the taxi she was surprised and ready at the same time.

The road curves around to the left past the green stucco house on the right past the green oaks on both sides of it. Trash waits to be picked up. A stack of fresh wooden crates sits on a lawn up the street. It's Monday and she is facing Northwest for the first time. In the old place it was East. Bright mornings and noon. Here it is late afternoon sunset. Everything is in boxes and waiting to be discovered. Or dumped. Most of it combustible. She dreamt of a conflagration. Only one book is saved; it is called *The Hunger and the Thirst*. Obviously an absurd text. But for now there is light and interesting scraps of paper with someone else's writing on them. On the road the cars moved gingerly, as if on tip-toe, so as not to disturb, or be disturbed. Yesterday's distinction between self-deceived and self-deception. She wants to succumb to neither, but perhaps that in itself is proof of one or the other. Filling up space are boxes of work she has set out for herself. No elves will come while she sleeps and do it for her. Her work whimpers like hopelessly neglected children. She speaks to them, promises them. This is the first day, you'll see.

He's got big feet and he smells like spaghetti sauce. Another's shoes are stylish but nearly ruined from walking on cobblestones and cement. So many beautiful but fraying. A light-hearted cloud pauses as if to say, "Poor Dears, having a bad time of it?"

Marking the date of the last hostilities. To keep track, to measure the distance between attacks. To determine if there are any attacks of a regular patterned recurrence. We are attempting to learn what exactly is the problem. We have attempted to create a feeling of plenty in the midst of uncertainty, sharing our cache of paprika and black pepper, the last handful of cashews. There are many mothers in the dream but she only remembers the one she had the least love from, who cursed her coming. Does anything end or do things circle in the air like distant smoke before settling permanently in the soul, coating it with dinge-like yellowed wallpaper. Every ground shifts above fault lines. Soon we will vacate this place and set up in another, different and probably a bit better than the last. We are learning to accept our inadequacy. The loneliness of the species.

As a runner approaches the end of the course, his efforts, his speed, his urgency to finish intensify. She is approaching such an end. Inside the blood rushes and separates from the walls of the uterus and flows down through the neck of the cervix. That's one level of it. Her disgust with neutrality is another level. Habituation is her most hated enemy. Another is indulgence, though not hated. What in the dark awakens her? She hears it when she is asleep. It keeps still during the waking hours. Why won't it speak to her openly? What will happen? Will everything come to an end at once? Bang. Clean cut. Finished. Now the sun rims the sky on the western side. Then it's there above the roof, then it's only a line that goes on. Stretching forward what is present to a line. Word loss. Voicelessness. Touchlessness. Blood rush, separates. A habit, a continuation. A red fountain dying, a day, a sunfall, a last cry. The Nanny's name used to be Sweet Lorraine.

She leaves the room after placing the warmed bottle of saké on the table in front of the guest. Neither the host nor the guest says a word at her departure, though, of course, she is not the waitress but the hostess. The guest has been flattering the host who beams at each verbal rose he is offered. She leaves the room and closes the door behind her, but they are talking louder with each cup of saké. The host runs down the list of all the name-people he has known. He mentions the young writers he has helped recently. He mentions he has traveled in Mexico. The guest asks if he went to a prostitute when he was in Mexico City. He admits he did and did not use a condom. His guest sounds impressed now and says he himself hopes to learn *agape* and practice *agape* toward others as Christ did. He is afraid it will prove too intense for him, however. He says all talk must have an element of danger in order to be interesting. The host goes back to describing the female collector he met in New York. The guest wants to know if she was after the host's body. In this way he makes the host feel desirable as a man by assuming this woman's desire for the host. The host desired the collector's wealth. Before he actually met her in the flesh he called her "My Peggy Guggenheim."

A beautiful Asian man—perhaps Korean—explodes in a fit of violence and pummels the torso on the pedestal until it falls to the floor, shattering. His demeanor returns to calm, relaxed. Doing it over and over only stops the movement, slows it to nothing. It's so hot in here. O yes shutting down. The heater makes her disgusted that lines are rolling past so forcibly. Back when the torso was crumbling it felt better. Why doesn't she find a nanny if that's what she wants. She wants—she wants to kill the Nanny. Silence continues to escape her. The Vietnamese student wrote, “Asians are voiceless, trained by their culture to be voiceless.”

The box is 2.5 x 3.5 inches and roughly 2 inches deep. Its lid fits tightly over its rounded corners, making it an oval rectangle. On the bottom of the box a label reads, “Handmade in Kashmir (India).” The surface of the box is lacquered black. Over the lacquer is a hand-painted flower design in Forget-Me-Not blue and gold. The blue flowers cover both the top and sides of the box. The inner box and underlid are black lacquer. Fine gold lines fill in the spaces between petals. A gold line is drawn along the edge of the lid forming a border for the blue flower design. Another gold line marks the top and bottom border of the flower fields around the sides of the box. The fineness of the lines speaks of painstaking attention to detail. The box is made of sturdy wood, its lightness and the delicate blue flowers and gold lines make it appear fragile, even soft. The rounded edges contribute to this soft appearance. It is a very pretty, charming little box, though not rare or exotic. Thousands, perhaps millions of these boxes have been produced in Kashmir just this year. They can be bought any day in gift shops and import stores. Useful, isn't it, for holding earrings or other small items easily left lying about, easily lost. This morning the little box demurely announces its place on her bedside table.

Frottaged clouds in the sky. Morning, Ernst. Street repairers work on the edge of the rotary with the machine that goes on repeating the same message: Clown sick Clown sick Clown sick. The clown descends and the sick comes up caught like a hiccup. There will be deep digging judging from the yellow crane with its giant-toothed scooper tucked up under its arm. And a white tool truck carrying ladders and orange bullhorns for markers or dunce caps? She goes inside and leaves the shoveller standing up to his buttocks in a rectangular hole. She has made a decision or just crossed the line. It is hard to see how it could be otherwise. In order to rise, every dirigible must drop excess weight. She is seeking higher air, hence the analogy. The less fortunate aspects of the comparison are apparent and noted.

The bed is once again made and they have lain there in the short sweet spasm after a long hard entry over icy sand. He has overcome his mother-loathing once again. Enough to let go. He has to wait until she gave up all expectation. Refusals come in threes as in all rituals of death. Her time has run out and run dry; she lies swollen in the empty river bed, vulva distended. He refuses her intensification for new orders. The death that waits between their arms. To realize anything, he must get everything without resistance. He will not respond to her only. Never so sweet as after she has sucked him. In his eyes she is a terrorist. He wants to remain on known ground. She threatens to expose the quicksand he stands in. Too frightening to let go in the dark. He waits until morning. She feels bludgeoned, there is no alternative. Nothing she says is accurate. He uses up his resources denying what she says. He tells her to find something else to do. She readily sees his point. She imagines what desire might be.

Proceeding cheerfully apropos of why not, and in the sheets were two unlooked for boons: blue sky and a host of lines which in and of themselves were incomprehensible, but spirited, conducive to spirit even in her. When the last flicker of light left, the sky was still blue in her eyes out of which tears did not fall making her more unfocused than usual. They said goodbye, promising vaguely a few things. She didn't get the other's address—small matter. The one line led to another until there she was at her place again. Bereft, beyond all of that afternoon which goes on ending, settling into widow's weeds before going out. What could she do but come in from the cold, shutting off the light behind her. Two examples lay displayed on the table: one plain, informative; the other whimsical, but carrying the same information. Why should she choose? Pain of decision, of division. Why were there only two? It was easier to narrow one's choices, to eliminate one or two confidently. With only two it became fraught, terrifyingly self-divisive. What the evening offered as consolation, the enormous presence of two. She can choose only one. She promised to take more risks only the day before. "Go on, you Ox," she chided.

When you say hate, she thinks, it is such a blockade. Hate. People hate it here, hate living here. You can see this in the subway tunnels. People destroy what they hate, slowly but surely. Hate sets coolly in the heart and gives no sign of its existence until it finds a worthy object. Hate is subtle, preferring small, scarcely perceivable marks. An underground fire that burns undetected 'til it's too late. Come to New York, Boston, Detroit, Philly, L.A. or Minneapolis. Hey! Suddenly everyone's wearing pants with buttons and bows along the back of the ankle.

Reduced to being copyists. Harder with words...something escapes. Crisp as new lettuce too. The oak is showing signs of balding on top. No sign of green or going somewhere, accomplishing something. Why not write a poem called "The Red Fountain?"

Doing in head, and stillness in body. Who has your body? Why can't she get it back? She was about to contribute, to speak, but a blank came down like a gate across her tongue. She looks at him, but cannot ask him for the words. When this happened to her friend's mother during their visit, the mother laughed and kept going.

She wants to continue with one point: sex. The trough where he waters himself and drinks. She doesn't understand why it is worth repeating. That trough of oozing pleasure, musty sea smells. It is a way out—temporarily—of isolation which in her case attacks the skin first, that aching encasement straining to make contact as if it were pulling off her bones, separating from the muscle tissue. When she prepares boneless chicken breasts, she slowly tears the skin from the breast flesh and feels her own skin is wrenched.

Is she the source of the drama she finds herself in with the others? Is this the jaundiced lens of her interpretation of their behavior? Whatever is there undergoes a shading more or less dark. If she liked them more, or trusted them... oh well, there she goes. Her dissatisfaction with them is endless. She would like to feel calm, neutral toward them. She would like to be decent, civil. How wonderful that sounds. It promises a day spent visiting and when the visit is over, it drops from the surface of the mind like a pebble off a high bridge barely rippling the water.

They say the creative force is female. Or feminine. She isn't clear about it. Sometimes she works against the masculine like cutting cloth on the bias. Other times it's a straight female flame that burns her right below the belly. But it moves, comes out of different parts of the body: Sadness as water in the veins.

No one expects an answer.

She lacks the desire to give and even objects are withdrawing from her. It is hardest to let go of others. To be let go! Her sense of significance to the other is on zero. Perhaps she should make a tribute, a farewell, a propitiation for future blessings.

Did it again. And pleased to say so. It's nothing to do actually: get up, prepare to go, then go to work. Small source of honor. Honor nonetheless. Did it. Again. Walking in. Believing in it. Acting on the belief in it. Paragraph by paragraph. Helpful. Showed up at the appointed place, on time, eager to do it. Did it. Again.

Morning returns surface mind to duty. Day before the holiday. No towing likely. Coffee second round. Crawling down the line out of my own skin into the airplane overhead, into the newspaper. Photo of Mark Strand. Most handsome poet in the U.S. along with Merwin.

No feeling of want for Christmas. No feeling of want. No need of things, no want of things. Testing herself in a store. See if the old lust rears up. No. No? Not so far. Have you kicked the habit? Eat when you're hungry. Sleep when you're tired. Need a friend more than anything purchased. Disavow all authority in favor of being here, going on with it. All evaluation is post *ipso facto*, so why bother? Did it again. Here again. No gain in a gain necessarily.

There was a long one-or-the-other feeling toward them. They were never all of them in the same room at the same time. That can't be true; there were only three rooms. Surely in the kitchen. There is nothing to support that.

A hush within as if she were holding her breath, a hugeness. The naked body loomed large and far away, far beyond her head and shoulders, and powerful, too bold. What she could see below her belly was more shocking than a baby's. She had wanted to seduce the Nanny with her legs up, her butt in full view. But now there is no wood for a fire.

Red water, red moon. Set up for the fall. Emancipate them. Set them loose. See you if you're ever in Kashmir or on the beach in Madagascar. Nowhere to go anymore, so keep going and drop the blood-letting; it won't work. The next rose or the last rose or a new rose -- whatever it takes. So far. Find a dime, lose a nickel, find a different nickel. Once 20 bucks wind-snatched out of her purse. Today another house boarded up. Red Cross instructions on the door: "What to do in a disaster." Too late. There are worse nights hanging on. Peripheral visions. Try to keep them off. It's blood they want.

The essential idea is gone as if it never was. Then why does she remember having it? The same questions still being asked. Answers "found," or "contrived," provisional, circumstantial, or transient. The word "imago" was an adventure. But this is not what she had intended. It was all up to memory.

She hasn't used a gun, nor sold even a single barbiturate. No one has shot up. She keeps it clean. No paper on the floor, no coffee stains on the dishtowels. All is white Formica—easy to wash. No, Sir, you're not going to get tired of coming to her place. Did you notice if anyone was counting when you were there? Was a face in the window?

Answer: the woman in the film.

A band of sun shines against the wall of the green house next door. Nothing else is visible. Nothing unusual about this. Although the trees have been stripped by the ruin of yesterday and the cold round of today, it is still cozy enough. The heater warms her back while the draft through the windows cools her face and hands. Her disappearance is inexplicable and a loss. She keeps trying to reconnect. The worm inside the marshmallow. Pushing a shaved, pointed stick into the white soft puff and holding it into the flames where it blows up, blackens and blisters until it explodes.

Watching herself skewered.

The fire all kindling and no logs pops and spits. Crackles and shots go off in a rain of sparks. Night is upon her—a short respite from her daily selves. In front of the wood stove named “Resolute,” she is so: resolute. Re sol ute. Decimation of syllables like fire cutting, popping, biting through poor scrap wood—resolutely burning. Get off the ground, round up some other fish to fry. What do you see in the fire? And where? In the high citadel above a hillside of olive trees.

The sun shines off the Aegean in the port of Nauphilion, the old Venetian Fortress in the harbor. Harbor where the lantern was hung to let her know the King was on his way home. She, remembering well how long the ride from the port would take the King, absent for ten years—absent at war, carrying loot and slaves and a list of the dead, the remnants of an army—moved in a flash: ordering food, torches lit, the yard spread with purple carpets all the way from the Lion’s Gate to the Great Hall. The servants given extra rations to welcome the men back to their homes in the village. Ordering white hyacinths to perfume the bath. While Aegisthus, that well-bred pet sleek and luxurious, eager to please, withdrew to his quarters. Agamemnon wore power like his own skin. She had grown ruthless.

Stridency has gone in favor of muted somber tones; the air is soft. Shirts are hung out to dry, arranged in order from largest to smallest, pinks to whites across the line. A red convertible—top down—underscores the reluctance to change season. Four more red cars around the rotary after the convertible. Who created all this for her? She can't remember half of it and wonders when it will direct her days. Red cars on the road this morning. In the end that's all it will be. As much as she can be certain of for the time being. Timed beings—that's us.

The catastrophe continues to produce aftershocks. She has married a policeman, a protector, whom she listens to unquestioningly, gratefully. Her heart's eye sees little girls crouched in pain. They are taken over, but not allowed to move on. None of the men, none of the women—least of all the Mothers—can do it. Life crawls over them as if they do not exist and they do not—yet. Only her clinging exists, blotting them out, pressing them into the endless expansion of the edges. One readily takes an offered exit, or waits crumpling up the years into used Kleenex.

Two in one day. Scalp pink under the widening gray. Both of them very thin and clinging to metal or glass edges. Trapped in torments to varying degrees. The one nearly forgotten but the voice recognized in front of the glass case. No way to avoid it. She had no impulse to flee which itself was a recognition. No embarrassment, though she rummaged around thinking she'd find a remnant of either feeling. But no. A case of coincidence. She didn't ask anything and that pink scalp...uncomfortable. As the time passed the saleswoman was more and more inept or indifferent, so the discomfort had to last a long time. Hers, making a show of being attentive, was merely wasting her time. She was in a rush and made gestures of annoyance.

—Damn. Sore elbow. Gotta get to Kenoza Avenue. Where is it from here? Where's here?

—You poor sonofabitch, don't you even know where you are? Get a seeing-eye dog, why don't you? They can take you anywhere you want to go.

—Sure, so what about this place on Kenoza?

—The coffee is always ready to go the night before. Everything you need to know is listed on the door. So do just like the list says -- nothing more, nothing less. Just follow the lead, will ya? Do whatever is on the list.

—Like what's on it?

—Easy stuff like take out the trash. Nothing is left open to question; all the holes have been plugged. You'll see. You'll like it once we get ya there. Any question you have has its own answer. None of this who cares or why do ya want to know bullshit. No. Every question gets its own answer. That's the way it is all the time there.

—What about the boss? Who's in charge of the place? Is it a guy or a girl? Who makes the lists?

—There's two of them, one of each. She makes the lists and he puts 'em up and crosses off things. Sometimes he lets one of us cross something off the list. Some of the guys think they're retarded.

—Who, them two or the others?

—Them and you too. It's coming up on the left.

—O shit, I forgot. I can't go left. Didn't I tell you I can't go left? Didn't I?

The child is gone or never was. She's alone and sick, dozing off. "Whitune" a strange word comes through sleep as a man in a white shirt opens a sliding closet door. The right leg has gone numb. The chair moves away from the window parallel to the rise of a cry in her throat. The body jumps back. They've got restrictions on everything here. She cannot come and go at will, or without purpose. She controls them, but pretends not to. She sits up, sits still. The hum of domestic motors. They work on and on, but they do not change place. What does the refrigerator know about uncertainty?

Veils and disguises are keys to revelation. It makes all the difference if the door opens in the center of the hall or off to the left or right, if red is blue-red or brown.

Going back and forth on a thin line in a small designated space. Following the imaginary blue line like an open road leading to a glass of wine, the lamp, the wind coming in through tightly closed windows, the line of headlights coming into the rotary. Her friend's led to England, and another man, another house, the line to happiness; hers leads to a flower or a noose. Where you are that's where I'll be.

Such as it was, it was, as such, a circular bit of nonsense. The mirrors at work again. The kick is creator of the reaction, reiteration, reverse repetition of the initiator, and as such, no extension, or new action. Simple re-action—the action again in reverse. This involves everything she does. Struggle to be active, to be free. No regrets, a lack and an absence. What if the Nanny had been kinder? Would it have made a difference? She has not been incarcerated in an institution, has she? Voluntary incarceration, perhaps. Advice on these matters has not been her privilege.

She goes off track so easily. After an hour the enormity of the action silences her. The other is the great dissimulator: pretending strength, decisiveness. Pretending control and maybe pretending love as well? She will fly to a new life without—leaving—gaping wounds everywhere she looks. She believes she has the capacity for joy. She must find her rhythm, a way to live. She's a hardy plant.

No continuity. Nothing to fall back on except the instinct to survive. That's entirely too dire. What about a tradition of creation? But do spontaneously created occasions have the deep roots of meaning (ritual) found in those handed down over generations? In her own created traditions she sought to emulate her idea of pre-Christian propitiation rights associated with Spring. She has strayed from a concern with tradition to that of filling up space. To approximate the reality of an action in order to create reality. If she knew what she was doing, she would take care of it. Hers is a tradition of uncertainty, a flapping in the breeze; a grand tradition of moving around in the same spot while trying to escape.

The Boss is driving and the road is rock-pitted and unpaved. There's no way to turn around. *Nel mezzo del cammin*. This full pulsing life arrayed like a retail display.

What about the business of the lie? That foray into fiction you took at a crucial moment. What part does it play in the silencing of her voice? You've never thought of that, have you? And what about the need you have for an outside imposition? At every level. You've cut back on the outer world. They ask, "Will she ever work again?" All goes begging. You have plenty to do. Take care of your business before it's too late.

The expected gathering did not occur; the doorbell has not, will not ring. What takes the place of unfulfilled expectations is named Château Tour La Vérité. Humorously. Boys in the street talk louder as the day's light narrows to a band of shell pink along the horizon. Sound in exchange for light; sound as the purveyor of action. This hour is a stopping place, an unexpected rest in the non-event of the afternoon in stark contrast with efficient preparations and expectations of the morning. Does she feel bad that the invited didn't come? She acknowledges non-arrival and considers carefully what book to read next and writes herself a note to go to CVS next time she's out. Someone will come eventually. You'll see. The tree is black against the dark blue sky. At 5 a.m. she saw him in a leap of lightning which made the tree stand white against the black clouds.

A chasm of blue keeps her in the outer air though she has remained where she is. Patched yellow trees—her miniscule importance to her self. She's hanging in there though she senses a disequilibrium. What that means is failing. But at what or why? Trees move in the breeze without questioning their individual leaves, or she supposes so. Let it go and go on with it. What about striving? You know she can't answer that, not today. Today she is out and about: simple errands. The few deeds still possible. She remembers the bluebirds she saw over the weekend. Delicate, almost lacy wings. Color. Coler, calor. Misunderstandings at the basic level. One letter shifts and you no longer make any sense.

Cars circle the rotary. Dinner is ready and waiting somewhere. It is time to put on the headlights. Rocks are cooling in the shadow of the house. The Spanish Oak has a palsy. In the lull between cars, the birds and the snap-twap of the football being caught. The hum of the cars is soothing, blanketing other sounds. As it grows later and darker, all that will change: the whole thing will go faster and louder. Pink stretches in long bands over the black-green trees and a car turns slowly into the driveway—the outside will come in. Crépusculaire.

To spit it out like a silkworm's larva, seamless, without breaks or gaps connecting in a pattern with an ever deeper center from which nothing could escape or break through without stopping to think about it, to comma and colon. Streamflow in the bed over rocks, among reeds. She lives in the general world without specialization, with common and ancient tools. "Crude" resists her, but is possibly it. The old man weaving strips for a new djellaba seated under a tree in the film on Ghana. By his estimate it is an undertaking of four years. Impoverished and determined. There is time to work on it. Being hungry to do it.

Interference/ The line snaps.

Broken to this day they are none the wiser. Two events must inevitably occur, must be linked to each other. Without fail: morning mail and weather report. Telephoning goes on as well and is welcome. But mail first—checks and letters. Checks first. She counted two enemies after all this time. That she knew of. Known enemies. Again they rested at the seashore. And one time he took off his and ran in over his head. And she was a little child too. We stayed in suits, then as now. Strangely it was that way. In Spring the air is mine; that's why her cheeks are red, her hair mussed. When everyone has a map they will see what to say and do their best to clear up the confusion. She is not required to hand out cue cards in the nightclub, though people will want to sing all the old familiar songs they haphazardly learned the words to. She knew others quite by heart. An occasion for exposure.

She cringed. Nevertheless she is authorized to choose a long distance service. All time is here. “Stop wondering why,” says the Nanny. At the back door something entirely different is taking place in monosyllables.

Incoming lines go like this: Glissando where it descends, whimsically skipping and night fills in the edges. He likes you better. Who knows? Who knows what's really going on? We repeat this several times. I don't know; you don't know. Strangely suspect. The bar. The drinks. What was he waiting for? Then that had to happen. It was just as it had been in the play when she returned with a cup of sugar. It stayed that way the entire Spring, yet she's hardly said a word about it. Anyone can tell. By the shores they stopped to rest their feet, and that's where it happened as if a narrative were underway when, unexpectedly, all fall down, or slip into something more comfortable—a loose wrap of incoherence suited to the occasion and she wore it with a flourish. It had left her punch-drunk, unable to defend herself. But no, at the front door they kissed cheeks warm and parted smiling. In another context, her old friend would have said, “To every front there is a back.” Sure ‘nuff.

FINIS

Patricia Pruitt was a poet who has been widely published internationally. Her most recent books are *Drawing Point* (Alyscamps Press 2016), *Full Moon at Sunset* (Talisman House 2017), and the posthumously published *Insistence* (Alyscamps Press 2018). Her *Collected Poetry Chapbooks 1991-2018* were recently published by Alyscamps Press. A volume of previously unpublished poems is forthcoming from Alyscamps Press. She died in April 2018, following a long battle with ALS.

Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno is the author of more than a half-dozen books, including acclaimed biographies of Paul Bowles and E.E. Cummings and a group portrait of American writers in Paris after World War II. He is also widely known as a poet and translator. Until his retirement, he taught at MIT for 25 years.

Blueline

by

Patricia Pruitt

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